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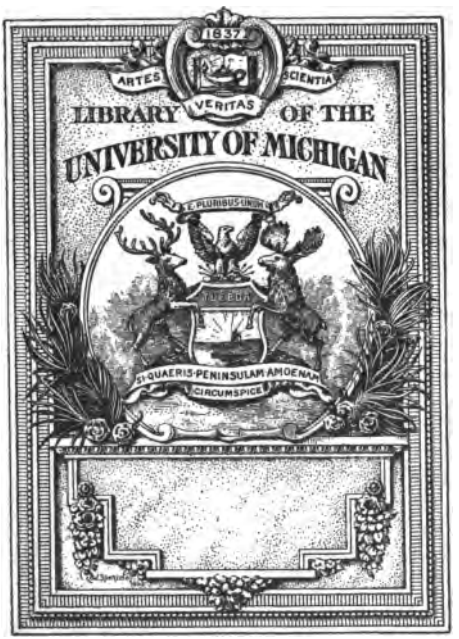
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BABY BELL

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BY

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

With Illustrations

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List of Illustrations.

ENGRAVED BY A. V. S. ANTHONY.

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"O'er which the white-winged angels go" . . JESSIE CURTIS.

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BABY BELL

BABY BELL.

I.

HAVE you not heard the poets tell
How came the dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours?
The gates of heaven were left ajar:

Baby Bell.

With folded hands and dreamy eyes,

Wandering out of Paradise,

She saw this planet, like a star,

Hung in the glistening depths of even,—

Its bridges, running to and fro,

O'er which the white-winged Angels go,

Bearing the holy Dead to heaven.

She touched a bridge of flowers, — those feet,

So light they did not bend the bells

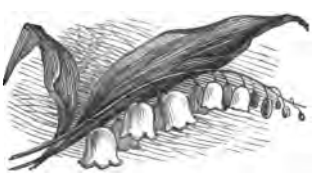
Of the celestial asphodels,

They fell like dew upon the flowers:

Then all the air grew strangely sweet!

And thus came dainty Baby Bell

Into this world of ours.



II.

She came and brought
delicious May.
The swallows built
beneath the eaves;
Like sunlight, in
and out the leaves
The robins went, the livelong day;

Baby Bell.

The lily swung its noiseless bell;

And o'er the porch the trembling vine

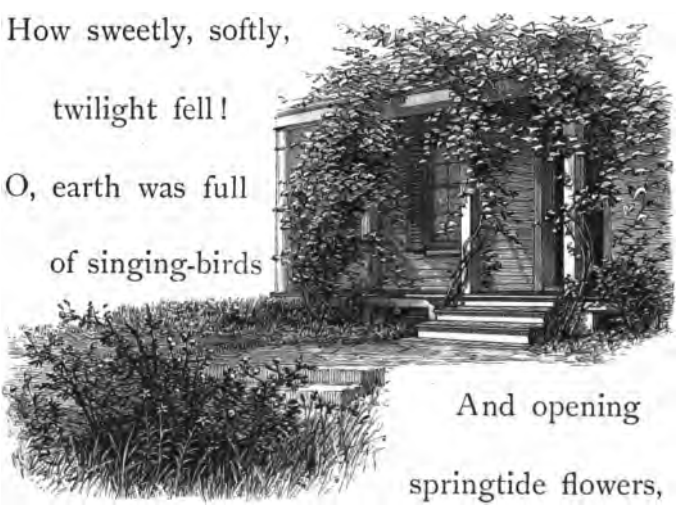
Seemed bursting with its veins of wine.

How sweetly, softly,

twilight fell!

O, earth was full

of singing-birds



And opening

springtide flowers,

When the dainty Baby Bell

Came to this world of ours!

III.

O Baby, dainty Baby Bell,

How fair she grew from day to day!

What woman-nature filled her eyes,

What poetry within them lay,—

Those deep and tender twilight eyes,

So full of meaning, pure and bright
As if she yet stood in the light
Of those oped gates of Paradise.
And so we loved her more and more:
Ah, never in our hearts before
Was love so lovely born!
We felt we had a link between
This real world and that unseen, —

Baby Bell.

The land beyond the morn;

And for the love of those dear eyes,

For love of her whom God led forth,

(The mother's being ceased on earth

When Baby came from Paradise,) —

For love of Him who smote our lives,

And woke the chords of joy and pain,

We said, *Dear Christ!* — our hearts bent down

Like violets after rain.

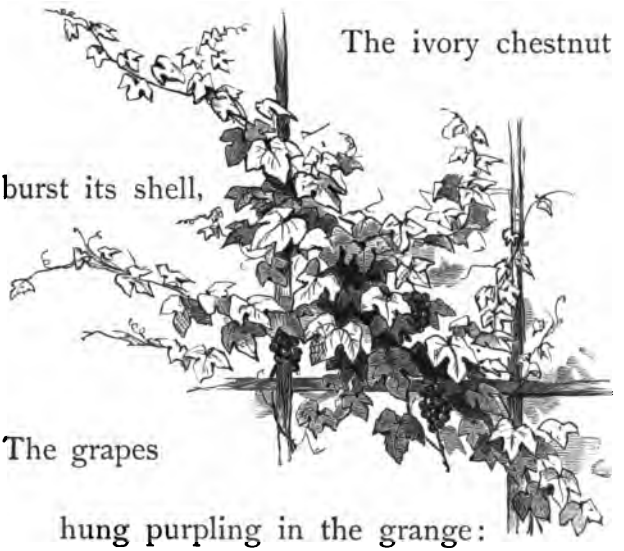
IV.

And now the orchards, which were white
And red with blossoms when she came,
Were rich in autumn's mellow prime;

Baby Bell.

The clustered apples burnt like flame,

The soft-cheeked peaches blushed and fell,



And time wrought just as rich a change

In little Baby Bell.

Her lissome form more perfect grew,

And in her features we could trace,

In softened curves, her mother's face.

Her angel-nature ripened too:

We thought her lovely when she came,

But she was holy, saintly now . . .

Around her pale angelic brow

We saw a slender ring of flame!

V.

God's hand had taken away the seal
That held the portals of her speech;
And oft she said a few strange words

Whose meaning lay beyond our reach.

She never was a child to us,

We never held her being's key;

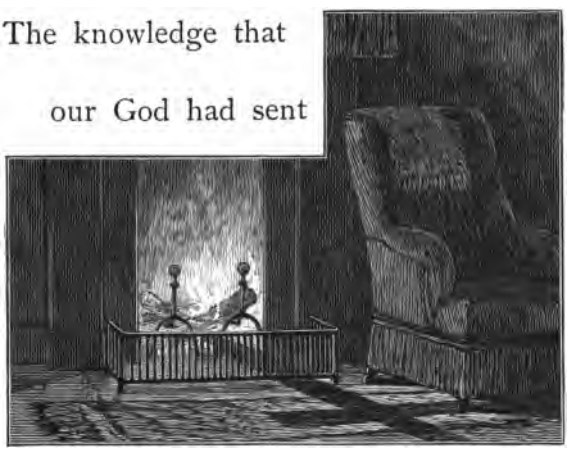
We could not teach her holy things:

She was Christ's self in purity.

VI.

It came upon us by degrees,

We saw its shadow ere it fell, —



His messenger for Baby Bell.

We shuddered with unlanguaged pain,

And all our hopes were changed to fears,

And all our thoughts ran into tears

Like sunshine into rain.

We cried aloud in our belief,

Baby Bell.

"O, smite us gently, gently, God!

Teach us to bend and kiss the rod,

And perfect grow through grief."

Ah! how we loved her, God can tell;

Her heart was folded deep in ours.

Our hearts are broken, Baby Bell!

VII.

At last he came, the messenger,

The messenger from unseen lands:

And what did dainty Baby Bell?

Baby Bell.

She only crossed her little hands,

She only looked more meek and fair!

We parted back her silken hair,

We wove the roses round her brow,—

White buds, the summer's drifted snow,—

Wrapt her from head to foot in flowers . . .

And thus went dainty Baby Bell

Out of this world of ours!